

Yes, The Blues:

A Simple Approach to Experience the Joy of Swingin' the Blues

2022 NMEA Conference
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8:00 - 9:00 am, WMB 130

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Why This Session? So many reasons!

- 4th year teaching high school...
- 2011 MMEA sessions & keynote
- Led to coursework with Christopher Azzara - DTMI
- Jazz at Lincoln Center's Band Director Academy with Ron Carter
- In the spirit of swing & sharing what I've seen work...



This Morning's Road Map...

- Identify, and set aside any fears!
- Creative Process = Imitate, Assimilate, Innovate
- Rhythm Train
- "Doo-d-la" Swing 8ths
- The TWO Blues Scales
- Learning Riffs through Call & Response
- Applying Major and Minor Blues in 12-Bar Form

What Are We Afraid Of?

- Fear of CHANGE
- Fear of FAILURE
- Fear of JUDGEMENT
- Fear of DYING
- Fear of LOSS
- Fear of INADEQUACY
- Fear of UNCERTAINTY

SAFE
SPACE

“Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing.”

Salvador Dali

Clark Terry on the Creative Process and Improvisation

3 Steps:

Imitation
Assimilation
Innovation



Imitation

The highest form of flattery!

- It's okay to imitate others - you need to start somewhere!
- Listening is the best - try to play back what you hear. Break it down, and repetition is a good thing.
- Imitate style - articulations, shadings, nuances in tone, etc.
- Help students transcribe riffs, and work up to complete choruses of solos.
- Reading transcriptions, and riffs, is a way to supplement the natural process of learning the language (listening) - but be sure to stress listening, too!

Assimilation

Pete and Repeat were in a boat, and Pete fell out...who's left?

- Complete absorption and mastery of these lines, articulations, style, etc.
- This takes long hours of practice to achieve this deeper connection.
- If you can SING it, you can PLAY it - encourage them to sing what they're listening to until they get every nuance.
- Students like to skip this step...remind them that SINGING makes it easier!
- Taking the thing in all 12 keys, etc., takes a LOT of patience and dedication... but it's worth it!

Innovation

So, now what?

- Many young players want to skip right to this - finding a fresh and unique voice...but how do they know if it's new without knowledge of what's been done already?
- Hours of imitation and assimilation will help them on this journey to ultimately finding their own creative ways of using these melodic, harmonic and rhythmic concepts they now own.
- All great innovators spent time imitating and assimilating the style of players before them.

Rhythm Train

(Side-together-side-together...)

- Chill out. No fear, safe space, remember?!
- 4 counts, left foot to the side on 1
- Right comes together on 2
- Right goes out to side on 3
- Left closes together on 4
- Lather, rinse, repeat!
- Bend the knees, relax the hips, snap/clap on 2 & 4, or “bounce the baby”

Doodle Tonguing

- Use Call & Response - this is a vocal tradition - support your voice with air!
- Use “D”
- A - E - I - O - U
- DA - DE - DI - DO - DU
- (Duple) DA - dle - DE - dle - DI - dle - DO - dle - DU - dle
- (Triple) DA - d - lah - DE - d - lah - DI - d - lah - DO - d - lah - DU - d - lah
 - -> Widely accepted “Doo - (d) - la” concept for feeling swing 8ths

The Blues

adapted from *The Blues Scales* by Dan Greenblatt

- One of the simplest forms in all of jazz
- It is extremely widespread - when you learn the Blues form, you are investing in something that can be transferred to hundreds of jazz tunes, and much contemporary music is based on the blues; you are dealing with something familiar and you learn something of continuing value
- The basic Blues form is extremely flexible, and is a form to which you will return throughout your development as an improviser.

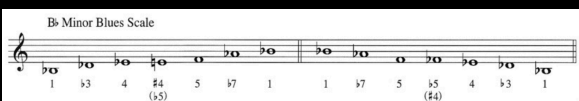
“The” Bb Blues Scale

Pros & Cons...

- “What notes should I use to improvise with?” Said every beginner, ever.
- The most common answer? “Use the Blues Scale,” in the key of that tune.
- PRO - it greatly simplifies the problem of playing on chord changes.
- PRO - a familiar, “down home” sound - can capture a “blue” sound easily.
- CON - missing too many notes: Major 3rd, as well as the 2nd and 6th.
- CON - no motion, no harmonic movement...need to “play the changes”...

There Are Really TWO “Blues Scales!”

Bb Minor Blues Scale



The second Blues Scale has a decidedly major sound because of the inclusion of the major 3rd (even though it also contains the minor 3rd as well). We will call this scale the “Major Blues Scale.” In the key of Bb, it looks like this:

Bb Major Blues Scale



Riffs Based On The Blues Scales!



We Are “Playing the Changes,” Yet Starting With Just Two Scales!

The First Principle Which scale, when?

- On the I-chord, use phrases derived from the **MAJOR BLUES SCALE**;
- On the IV and V-chords, use phrases derived from the **MINOR BLUES SCALE**

The First Principle for Blues Improvisation

On the I-chord, use phrases derived from the **Major Blues Scale**;
On the IV- and V-chords, use phrases derived from the **Minor Blues Scale**.

Let's go back to the most basic blues progression and use the "First Principle" to create the appropriate blues scales (Bb Major Blues Scale or Bb Minor Blues Scale), which you will see listed underneath each bar. The chords and scales will look like this:

Major Minor Major Minor

“Don’t let perfect be the enemy of good.”